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NEWS
FROM YOUR MUSEUM
THE ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Know your Museum better

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THE ROMANS HAD INFLATION

If you do not believe that there is danger of inflation in Canada, you should examine some Roman coins from the fourth century, B.C., to the fourth century A.D. They are on view in the Royal Ontario Museum. At first the unit, an As, weighed a Roman pound. It was cast in copper 2½ inches in diameter and yet even such a gigantic coin could buy only little and at the highest was worth only 1,200 to the pound of gold. Imagine how many huge wagons had to follow the army, just to carry the soldiers' pay! In the days of Caesar, the workmen's normal wage (about sixteen cents a day) would barely buy a pound of pork. From then on the price of meat and bread rose rapidly. By the third century A.D. one pound of pork cost, in terms of the original gold standard, some 416 times what it had in the days of Caesar and by the reign of Constantine, 1440 times its earlier value. This inflation may be seen graphically in the change from the fat coppers to the good solid silver, then through the silver coins growing rapidly thinner and more diluted to the shabby coins of the fourth century A.D., paper thin, of base metal, no longer even pretending to be silver, of which we have a hoard of over 6,700 coins, the total value of which would be worth only about one-quarter of a pound of gold.

From distant centuries comes a timely warning for us to-day.

NO FAMILY ALLOWANCE NEEDED

Large families are in order—among Ruffed Grouse, that superb game bird known to most sportsmen as "partridge." The present period represents a low ebb in their population as a whole across Canada. Periodically and almost mysteriously, their ranks are decimated. On the average, about every ten years Ruffed Grouse die off, probably as a result of communicable disease. Then slowly their numbers increase again.

Ornithologists of the Royal Ontario Museum who have followed this strange phenomenon now suspect that in some way nature comes to the rescue when Ruffed Grouse are dangerously scarce. The last two years represent in general a period of grouse scarcity. During this period the number of eggs, in fourteen nests examined, ranged from ten to fifteen. The average number of eggs, thirteen, is two higher than the all-time average for the species. If these facts hold true on a wide scale then they help explain the grouse's comeback. But truth is hard to establish and the way of science takes time and patience.

SPECIAL EXHIBITION HELPFUL

Nearly 25,000 visitors came to the Museum while the special exhibition, "Design in Industry", was on display. An exhibition of contemporary industrial design, sponsored by the Museum and the Canadian Handicrafts Guild (Ontario), its purpose was to inspire the manufacture and buying of articles of fine design and workmanship in Canada, so that this country may compete with others in the quality of its products despite its small and scattered population.

BEFORE THE ICE CAME IN ONTARIO

What was Ontario like before the last Ice Age? From striations on rock, varved clays and much other evidence presented in the galleries of the Royal Ontario Museum, this is the picture that has been pieced together in answer:

Not one of the Great Lakes, nor Niagara River with its falls, was in existence. In place of the Great Lakes a large river known as the Laurentian River drained, by way of the St. Lawrence Valley, the basins which hold these lakes to-day. There were a few lakes in the northern areas where there are now thousands. There was a mantle of soil in the north where the rocks have been scraped bare. The province stood much higher above sea level than it does to-day.

With the advance of the glaciers from the north and northeast, the old valleys were filled up with drift: boulders, sand and mud. These old filled-in valleys have been found when drilling wells or in drilling for power sites. Depressions were scooped out and when the last glacier melted away all the low spots became filled with water. Lakes were formed and the water ran out at the lowest points on their rims. Thus an entirely new drainage system was developed and this is responsible for our great hydro-electric sites.

A FEATHER DROPPED IN PASSING

There are many rare and exquisitely beautiful specimens of birds in the galleries of the Royal Ontario Museum. These vary from the large and showy birds of paradise to the gem-like humming-birds. Yet in the Museum there is another bird specimen the rarest of them all, whose name is unknown. Its song has never been heard. The colour of its plumage has long since faded. This is a fossilized specimen consisting of a single feather shed in flight nearly fifty million years ago, and now delicately preserved in soft, crumbly rock. The feather fell in or near some body of water in the present region of the French Alps. Accumulating muds, which later hardened into rocks, covered it and preserved it for us to study.

Birds are seldom found in the fossil state, since their remains are not likely to fall in places where they would be preserved in durable form. One feather is, therefore, a real prize and assists us in tracing out the ancestry of birds.

1. THE LOCAL MUSEUMS: THE PROBLEM

In this and later issues we shall discuss the local museum and its role in Ontario. In this matter the Royal Ontario Museum has an interest and responsibility as it is a provincial institution. In 1932 a Carnegie committee reported its survey of the museums of Canada. Of the total of 37 museums given for Ontario, most are ineffective. They lack the financial support, adequate housing and trained staff which are necessary to the full prosecution of their job.

Back of all this is the failure of people at large to realize that the local museum, like the public library, can be an important auxiliary instrument of education.